

Communication: The Key to Effective Change Management

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Moving at the speed of change. This statement could be the buzz-phrase of the nineties, and into the new millennium. Those senior officers tasked with the responsibility of leading their organizations into the next millennium will not be able to do it alone. They will need the idea's, support, and participation of everyone in their organizations.

The problem that prompted this project was that the Range Complex Fire Department has not always communicated and implemented change effectively. The purpose of this project was to evaluate the perceptions of both senior officers, and rank and file personnel on how effectively change is communicated and implemented. This study was also used to measure personnel's resistance to change.

The descriptive and evaluative research methods were used. The research questions were:

1. Do rank and file personnel feel that change is communicated effectively?
2. Do senior officers feel that they communicate change effectively?
3. Are fire department personnel resistant to change?

A literature review and one interview were conducted to gain insight into communication during change management. Sixty three survey instruments, and one hundred and two personal change instruments were used to measure fire department personnel's perception on how effective change is communicated; whether personnel are resistant to change, and to answer the questions raised for this project.

The results of this study identified communication as the key ingredient in managing change; that the perceptions of senior officers differ significantly from the rank and file personnel on how effectively change is communicated. The study also identified that fire department personnel are not resistant to change, in fact, the study indicated that fire department personnel show an openness for change.

The recommendations were: that this project be made available to all senior officers as soon as possible; that senior officers review their communications skills, and basic human resource management practices. Participants of the Executive Fire Officer Program make a concerted effort to explain the benefits of the Change Management Model, as well as imparting new information obtained from the program to all officers. Senior officers should take advantage of the fire department personnel's openness to change.

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INTRODUCTION

Moving at the speed of change. This statement could be the buzz-phrase of the nineties and into the next millennium. Those senior officers tasked with the responsibility of leading their organizations into the next millennium will not be able to do it alone. They will need the idea's support, and participation of everyone in their organizations. With an ever increasing demand for services by customers of fire and emergency services, coupled with decreasing operating budgets, senior fire officers are, and will be forced, as a matter of survival, to change the way their business is conducted.

One reason for a lack of more effective approaches to change management is an inability to communicate effectively. How many times have we all heard, or during the course of our career's, said: "What's going on with those guys in the front office"? "What are they thinking about"? The chiefs never let us know what's going on".

The above statements may be just the opposite for those chief officers that are trying to lead change. A statement such as: "We instituted this change over a year ago, and we still don't have everyone doing what we wanted", could be made by any chief officer in the country. Change brings with it challenges for both line personnel and chief officers. Coping with change mainly involves the understanding and use of communication and human relations skills.

Success in accomplishing improved productivity, greater efficiency, or better service does, and will depend on how well both senior management, and line personnel communicate through change. Those chief officers not willing, or unable to involve all personnel will find their journey into the next millennium a rough and rocky road, met with resistance by those personnel who will have to implement the changes needed to survive.

Fire service personnel are our most valuable resource. The problem that prompted this research project is that the Range Complex Fire Department (RCFD) has not always communicated change effectively. The purpose of this project was to evaluate the perceptions of both senior officers, and rank and file personnel (lieutenants and below) on how effectively change is communicated and implemented. This study was also used to measure the RCFD personnel's resistance to change. To complete this study the descriptive and evaluative research methodologies were used to answer the following questions:

1. Do fire department rank and file personnel feel that change is communicated effectively?
2. Do senior officers feel that they communicate change effectively?
3. Are rank and file personnel resistant to change?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The idea for this project was inspired through a lecture given by Mr. Bruce Rommelt, and participation in an exercise utilizing personal change instruments. Both activities were conducted during the Strategic Management of Change (SMOC) course, as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy. The lecture involved change management, and the use of the Change Management Model (CMM). During the course of the lecture Mr. Rommelt was discussing the role of executive fire officers when attempting to lead change. One of those roles was that of a communicator, and how through that role, senior officers should discuss the change process with everyone in their organization, recognize other peoples' concerns, and diffuse any rumors about the change.

While listening to the lecture it became evident to the author that the RCFD senior management had not been communicating changes effectively, and was not managing change in a manner that would ensure success. Two personnel from the RCFD had already attended the SMOC course and were

familiar with the CMM, but had not passed on the benefits of the model to senior officers within the department. During the personal change exercise utilizing resistance to change, and Type O/Type D questionnaires, it was decided that these instruments would be a good way to determine if RCFD personnel were resistant to change, or showed an openness for change.

The RCFD is a federal fire department located in Nevada. The initial mission of the RCFD was to provide aircraft crash firefighting and structural fire protection. Over the years the department has evolved to provide additional services such as: hazardous materials response and mitigation, medical response and transport, as well as a number of specialized rescue services. It is understood that information such as population served, when the fire department was organized and other information about the organization is generally discussed in this section. Due to security constraints this information cannot be discussed in this paper.

There are three specific events that helped influence this project: First, in 1993 the RCFD implemented a personnel accountability system for fire ground operations. While conducting research for an applied research project for a SMOC class in 1996, Assistant Chief Michael D. Jackson conducted a study of why the RCFD was not utilizing the accountability system nearly three years after it was supposed to be implemented. In chief Jackson's report he indicated that the program had met with some resistance by both rank and file, and incident commanders. Chief Jackson pointed out in the study that a lack of communicating the need for the program, as well as not requesting feedback from the rank and file was a contributing factor in the program not being institutionalized. It is now 1999, and the RCFD still does not have an effective accountability system in place.

Secondly, A program that the RCFD has failed to institutionalize is the department Career Development Program. This program was implemented at the direction of the Department of Defense

(DOD) Fire Protection Flight. Through the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress, all firefighters from the rank of chief down are required to participate in the program. The program requires that depending on your rank, you are required to obtain certifications as outlined in National Fire Protection Standards for Professional Qualifications.

This program was implemented in 1994, and as a participant of the program, the goals, and benefits, as well as the ramifications for non-compliance have yet to be explained. Management has not yet been able to achieve buy-in from the program participants, and as of 1999 not all personnel have received the required certifications.

Finally, while transferring to the headquarters station in another division of the RCFD, the author received an email from another chief officer. The relevance of the correspondence to this project was not known until returning from the SMOC course. One section in the email that now has great meaning is this: “If you think that by coming to this station you will suddenly be in the information loop, your wrong! This place is the Gobi Desert of Communications” (Mike Jackson Assistant Chief, email, 1998).

This project is necessary to satisfy the requirements of the Executive Fire Officer Program course titled “Strategic Management of Change”. The project is directly related to Module 3: Managing Change using the Change Management Model, and Module 5: Personal Aspects of Change Management, of the Strategic Management of Change student manual, which relates to communicating change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was intended to gain insight into change management, and to determine if the RCFD communicates change effectively. The literature review is divided into four sections, and addresses the issues raised by the research questions, and RCFD surveys.

Communication

As fire service managers approach the millennium, greater emphasis will be placed on providing a leaner, more organized and efficient organization. As the workforce becomes more knowledgeable, and better educated, senior officers will be forced to manage in a more “open” climate. Communication must be two-way, providing both information to the employees, and opportunities for the employees to express their concerns and opinions about the change.

Hirschfield (1999) discusses the importance of communicating change management by stating: “Communications should be forthright, easily understood, and not patronizing” (p.1). Hirschfield continues the discussion further. “Take extra steps to ensure that every communication piece has a clear purpose and a target audience. This approach to communication helps set expectations, tells a coherent story, and fosters behavior and attitude changes” (Hirschfield, 1999, pp.-4, 5).

A good leader, manager, or change agent, takes steps to ensure that the communication process is being carried out effectively. Duck (1999) in an article for the *Harvard Business Review*, points out: “Everything managers say-or-don’t say delivers a message. Too many managers assume that communications is a staff function, something for human resources or public relations to take care of. In fact, communications must be a priority for every manager at every level” (p-111).

Hardy (1997) expands on the point made by Duck.

Good change managers: explain changes regularly and as fully as possible; communicate

more often with their teams than in normal circumstances. An absence of communication is a more common problem than poor communications. Maintain consistency in communication ensuring that: their words and actions are consistent; their words at one time are consistent with words and actions at other times (p.19)

Kossen (1994) expands further by stating: "...any modification of the work environment tends to upset the equilibrium of those affected. Consequently, clear and effective communication of any change and its possible effects is essential if the work force is to accept it" (p.331).

In the book titled: *Successfully Managing Change*, Hardy explains that leaders thinking about implementing change must ask themselves four key questions before change should be communicated, they are: "Who needs to be told? What needs to be told? When should they be told? And, How should they be told?" (Hardy, 1997, p-41). Hardy elaborates on the Who? What? When? And, how?

Who? Everyone who will be affected.

What? You should communicate as much information as possible in order to: respect the intelligence of subordinates, and to win their trust and respect.

When? As soon as possible after decisions have been made; continuously, as required, after the first announcement (communication of, and about change is not a one-time event but an on-going process).

How? Orally, this allows for modification in light of reactions; questions can be answered.

Writing, this allows for total coverage and standardization. Visually, drawings and diagrams can supplement written and oral communication (Hardy, 1997, pp. 41, 42).

Kosson (1994) expands on the questions needed to be asked, as stated by Hardy, by adding: “How might my subordinates view and react to this change” (p. 330)?

“Good communications are the lifeblood of any enterprise, large or small, communications are essential to keep our entire organization functioning at maximum levels and to make the most of our greatest management resource- - our people” (Hersey, Blanchard, 1993, p. 327). Hirschfield (1999) continues by stating: “Communication is an essential ingredient in managing change. No amount of communication is too much, and more is better” (p. 3). Duck (1993) expands on Hirschfield: “It is important for the messages to be consistent, clean and endlessly repeated. If there is a single rule of communications for leaders, it is this: when you are sick of talking about something that you can hardly stand it, your message is finally starting to get through” (p. 111).

Finally, In an Open Learning in the Fire Service Program (OLFSP) course titled: *Personnel management in the Fire Service*, the ramifications of communications in an “Open” versus a “Closed” organizational climate are discussed:

One way of describing an organization is to identify its “climate or environment”. This climate is shaped by the team, especially the leader. An “open” climate is evidence of free-flowing communication and lack of game playing among personnel. Frank and productive working relationships exist, and there is a willingness to change for the betterment of the team. A “closed” climate is characterized by poor communication and unofficial sanctions against personnel who speak up. Workers seldom know where they stand, and organizational development and change are resisted (National Fire Academy, 1994, p. 2-7).

The literature review identified communication as essential when attempting a change. The review also pointed out that it is the leaders responsibility to ensure that change is communicated at all

levels, as well as throughout the change process. Leaders must identify the who, what, when, and how change is to be communicated if they are to be successful.

Resistance to Change

It is human nature to resist change. We are creatures of habit, and prefer the security of familiar surroundings. As changes occur in our environment, most people will not react positively to those changes.

Chief Randy Bruegman in an article titled: *Breaking the Rules: The Transformational Leader*, discusses the negative emotions that are a natural occurrence during change. Bruegman (1994) states:

We first need to understand that change creates fears, stress, and anxieties. The leaders job is to recognize that these negative feelings exist and help people channel them toward a positive end. Simply getting people involved, talking through issues, is often enough to do just that. If you fail to do so, the transformation you've set forth for your organization will never occur (p. 36).

Haas echo's Bruegman: "During times of significant change, it's not uncommon for personnel to feel anxiety, uncertainty and apprehension. Effective communication plays a key role in providing stability during these transitional periods" (Haas, 1999, p.20).

Davis outlines how by leaving employees out of the change process, resistance will occur.

By leaving employee's out of the initial planning process and "springing it on them" in a meeting, you have violated a basic tenant of human nature: most people resist change. As a species we, like other things in nature, seek balance and consistency. Change causes imbalance, so we work to restore by resisting changes - - especially sudden changes. In short, management has had the

time, the authority and the control to adjust their thinking and their plans to change. The employees have had none of that (Davis, 1999, p.1).

Hirschfield (1999) echo's' Davis by stating: "Insufficient information about the impetus for change and its sought-after benefits is likely to cause considerable distress among those affected by change" (p. 1)

Reducing or eliminating the natural behavior associated with change can be accomplished through effective communication about, and how, the change might affect employees. Kosson (1994) goes on to state:

Any leader attempting to introduce change into the organizational environment should make special efforts to see that affected individuals understand its utility. Workers who see no valid reason for a new situation will tend to resist it, they may feel that change has occurred just for the sake of change rather than for any logical reason (p. 329).

Dubrin expands on Kosson by describing how communicating through negotiation can help in reducing resistance, Dubrin (1996) goes on to state:

Resistance to change can be reduced by discussing and negotiating the more sensitive aspects of change. The fact that discussion is a form of participation contributes to its effectiveness.

Discussion also leads to negotiation, which further involves employees in the change process (p. 95).

The discussion is continued by White and Chapman: "Resistance to change will be less intense when those affected or those who believe they might be affected, know why the change is being made and what the advantages are. This can be done most effectively by letting them participate in actual discussions about change, including planning sessions" (pp. 129, 130).

Marshall and Connor go a step further by describing “sincere selling” as a means of managing employee resistance, stating:

...the “sincere seller” will work on team communication to insure that employees understand what the change project entails and feel comfortable expressing resistance honestly. This level of communication will also enable managers to understand whether employees are having a positive or negative reaction to change (Marshall, Connor, 1996, p.6).

Continuing: “Sincere selling means that throughout the change process we are consistently working with employees to help them understand the individual implications of our change initiatives so that we can recognize resistance, surface it, manage it and get it behind us” (Marshall, Connor, 1996, p.- 7).

In an interview with Rick Brown of the Results Group, a change management consulting firm. Mr. Brown spoke of employees needing a clear understanding of the proposed change to help overcome resistance. Mr. Brown also stated that: “Credibility is lost and resistance increased when management fails to communicate all elements of the proposed change to affected employees” (Rick Brown, telephone interview, June 22, 1999).

White and Chapman expand on the point of credibility by Brown. Continuing:

Mistrust about change arises when employees have inadequate information, when they are kept in the dark, and when rumors disseminate false alarms. One major reason for this is they feel helpless- -they cannot influence the process. To build a trusting communication climate, tell the truth. Given the facts, employees feel they are able to do something about a problem (White, Chapman, 1997, p- 130).

The literature reviewed was instrumental in identifying natural reactions to change; fear, anxiety, and apprehension. The review also pointed out how effective communication is key in reducing or eliminating resistance by those personnel who would be most affected by a proposed change.

Participation

Involving employees from start to finish in any program has always been considered good management practice. Change projects are no different.

In his book *Creating Strategic Change*, Pasmore (1994) discusses the issue of making half-hearted attempts at participation by stating:

As long as we make half-hearted efforts at participation, we will get half-hearted buy-in from employees and mixed results. If we want people to participated fully and achieve success through participation, we have to act like we really mean it (p. 63).

Davis expands by identifying the ramifications of not involving the workforce from the beginning:

...an organization that has not brought its work force into the planning and organizing phase can expect a much greater loss of productivity while the employees go through the phases of a change cycle: denying, resisting, exploring, and finally accepting the new system” (Davis, 1999, p. 2).

Davis (1994) continues by identifying the effectiveness of full participation, continuing:

“An organization that includes the human resources factors from the very beginning will see its plans implemented faster and more effectively with less stress and turn-over. Moreover, employees who have helped plan and implement the change will embrace it rather that resist it” (p. 2).

Kosson (1994) discusses the issue of fostering greater commitment on the part of employees, by involving them in the entire process, stating:

When change is necessary, the use of participation can be especially helpful because it often cultivates greater commitment on the part of the participants. Employees tend to be happier to see self-imposed innovations succeed than those that they feel have been forced upon them. Ideas developed by the entire group (the supervisor and his or her workers) working together are frequently more effective and creative than those developed by one-person rule. Managers should therefore encourage subordinates to air their feelings, positive or negative, about proposed changes. Changes generally seem much less threatening when employees can discuss them openly (pp. 331-332).

Coggin (1993) identifies the importance of the team concept by stating: “The importance of a team approach to change must be emphasized. Spend time as a team studying the change process and discussing how to handle change successfully” (p. 97). Coggin continues: “A collective approach allows the team to not only assist the organization through change, but allows them to take credit for the successful implementation” (Coggin, 1993, p. 97). Dubrin (1996) echoes Coggin. “The best documented way of obtaining commitment to change is to allow people to participate in the changes that will affect them” (p. 95). “...those most affected by the proposed change should be among those most involved in bringing it about” (Hirschfield, 1999, p. 3).

Finally, White and Chapman (1997) discuss the issue of open communication with those most involved with the problem, stating:

...open communication can stimulate many good ideas from those who are best acquainted with the problem that requires change. It also alerts managers to potential problems that might arise

when the change is implemented. Such an approach also involves employees in the diagnostic and creative process (p. 130).

The review was important in identifying how involving all employees in the change process can increase the amount of new, and creative ideas about the change. The review also pointed out how increased commitment or “buy in” on the part of employees can be achieved through open communication, and the use of a participatory management style.

Feedback

During all phases of a change project, leadership should provide feedback to employees so that they may have some measurement of how they (the employees) are contributing, or not, to the change process. Kuczmarski and Kuczmarski (1995), discuss the issue of leaders providing insufficient feedback: “Insufficient feedback creates employees who are unhappy. The lack of communication and feedback between management and employees can leave most employees guessing what their organizations values and norms are. In order to derive satisfaction, employees need and appreciate feedback” (p. 55). Continuing: “Leaders or managers also need to provide employees who warrant constructive criticism with proactive advice on how to improve” (Kuczmarski, Kuczmarski, 1995, p. 210).

Pasmore (1994) expands by stating: “People want to know how they are doing individually, as a team, as a unit, as an organization. Usually they find the information they receive extremely helpful and will take the steps necessary to do better next time” (p. 211).

Kouzes and Posner (1993) detail how sharing information through feedback, can create a greater understanding of what’s expected of employees. “Leaders must understand that unless they

communicate and share information, few will take much interest in what is going on in the organization”

(p. 172). Continuing the discussion further:

...with detailed feedback that includes such factors as quality, quantity, timeliness, and customer services, people can become self-corrective and can more easily understand the big picture.

With feedback they can also determine what help they need from others and who might be able to benefit from their assistance (Kouzes, Posner, 1993, p. 173).

Kouzes, and Posner (1993) continue and expand the discussion:

As people perfect new skills, provide informational feedback on how they are doing, focus on corrective changes that need to be made, instead of emphasizing what was wrong or flawed.

Keep in mind that feedback should be given to build confidence. This result is achieved by calling attention to successes and improvements while correcting deficiencies (p. 182).

Continuing: “Sufficient success using what they have learned is necessary so that they believe in themselves and in the value of new ways” (Kouzes, Posner, 1993, p. 182).

In an interview with Rick Brown of the Results Group, Mr. Brown identified the use of “milestones as a measurement to be used in providing feedback. “During difficult change the use of “milestones” or “small wins” can be used to determine where you are in the change process. Lets us know how we are doing things differently” (telephone interview, June 21, 1999).

Mr. Brown goes on to say:

“Everyone should have input in feedback sessions. Communication during feedback sessions should be both vertical (top to bottom) and horizontal. This allows for continuous improvement of the change process. Feedback should be as positive an experience as possible. By doing so,

employees will be more open to suggestions for improvement (telephone interview, June 21, 1999).

Today's managers must provide on-going continuous feedback on both the negative and positive aspects of performance. Harrington (1995) discusses negative feedback: "Employees that rarely receive positive feedback or an abundance of negative feedback, feel that they are inadequate and that management is down on them" (p. 204).

The review identified feedback as an important ingredient in any change project. Also identified was that effective communication, both vertical and horizontal allows for all participants to express idea's and for continuous improvement of the process.

PROCEDURES

Literature Review Methodology

The first step in the research process was to locate any books, professional journals, and Executive Fire Officer (EFO) research papers related to change management. An initial computer search was conducted in January 1999 at the Learning Resource Center, located at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland. A review of reference lists of EFO papers helped identify additional references not identified by the computer.

Computer searches were also conducted in March and April 1999 at the Clark County Public Library in Las Vegas Nevada, and the National Emergency Training Center's Learning Resource Center on-line card catalog, to locate additional material. The on-line card catalog was located on the world wide web, (Internet) at the following electronic address: <http://www.lrc.fema.gov>.

Survey Methodology

Two survey instruments were used in preparation for this project. The two survey instruments were used to gauge both the RCFD rank and file personnel (appendix A), and senior officer's (appendix B) perception on how change is communicated in the RCFD. The rank and file personnel consisted of lieutenants and below. The senior officer survey consisted of station captains through the fire chief. A pilot survey was conducted on three firefighters. They were asked to review both surveys for mistakes. The firefighters indicated that the surveys were free of mistakes and understandable.

The rank and file survey contained six questions. The first five questions were multiple choice, using a scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and the last was open-ended to allow for personal viewpoints. Fifty seven surveys were distributed on May 14, 1999 with a return date of 22 May 1999. Fifty surveys were returned by the due date, for return rate of eighty nine percent.

The senior officer survey contained seven questions. Five questions were multiple choice, using a scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and two questions required a yes or no response. Thirteen surveys were distributed on 14 May 1999 with a return date of 22 May 1999. Thirteen surveys were returned by the due date, for a return rate of one hundred percent.

Resistance to Change Exercises

The two personnel change instruments were used to measure RCFD personnel's resistance to change, and whether or not personnel were danger-oriented, or opportunity-oriented with regard to change. Both exercises were taken from the Strategic Management of Change student manual. Students were encouraged to use the instruments upon returning to their respective departments.

The first exercise was a Reaction to Change Inventory (appendix C). This exercise utilized word association to determine personnel's resistance or support of change; personnel were asked to circle those words they most associate with change, and on the corresponding sheet, assign a point value for

the words chosen. Sixty four Reaction to Change instruments were distributed on 14 May 1999, with a return date of 22 May 1999. Fifty one instruments were returned by the due date, for a return rate of seventy nine percent.

Sixty four TYPE O/TYPE D QUESTIONNAIRES (appendix D) were also distributed on May 14, 1999 with a return date of May 22, 1999. The questionnaire consisted of 18 statements related to change. Personnel were asked to rate each statement using a scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Number values for each statement were located on a separate section of the questionnaire; personnel were asked to compute their totals. The score indicated whether personnel viewed change in a positive or negative way. The exercise was distributed on 14 May 1999, with a return date of 22 May 1999. Fifty one questionnaires were returned by the due date, for a return rate of seventy nine percent.

Interview Methodology

One interview was conducted by telephone on 22 June 1999. The purpose of the interview was to obtain background information on change management, to discuss the results of the survey instruments, and to help identify recommendations for communicating change in the RCFD.

The person interviewed was Mr. Rick Brown. Mr. Brown is a change management consultant for the Results Group Inc. The Results Group is a consulting firm specializing in organizational change. Mr. Brown was contacted via the world wide web (Internet) on the firms web page, at the following electronic address: <http://www.resultgp.com>.

Mr. Brown was asked the following questions: In your opinion, what is the most important aspect of managing change? How important is communication in overcoming resistance to change? What are some useful approaches to providing feedback, and how important is it to provide feedback

to all employees? How important is employee participation in the change process? And finally, Are you familiar with the Change Management Model? In addition, Mr. Brown was general information questions regarding his area of expertise.

Definition of Terms

Change Agent: Person who has the knowledge, and foresight to guide the organizational efforts of a needed change.

Change Management Model: Model identified during the Strategic Management of Change course at the National Fire Academy. Consists of four phases, Analyzing, Planning, Implementation, and Institutionalizing change. Used as a guide for senior fire officers in bringing about organizational change.

Institutionalism: The point at which behaviors necessary to bring about change become an integral part of an organization's culture.

Internet: a world-wide computer network allowing instant communication and access to information.

Reaction to Change Inventory: Instrument designed to assist individuals in realizing how they perceive and react to change. Provided by the National Fire Academy as part of the Strategic Management of Change course.

Resistance: Any attempt to maintain existing conditions when change is indicated.

Type D: Danger-oriented individuals; threatened by and unable to overcome problems of change.

Type O: Opportunity-oriented individuals; see beyond problems of change to the opportunities it presents.

Type O/Type D Questionnaire: Instrument used to determine whether individuals are opportunity-oriented or danger-oriented with regard to change.

Limitations

Research articles were limited to books and journals published after 1992 in an attempt to keep the information presented as current as possible. Inexperience and a lack of training in interview and survey methodology may have hindered this project to some degree.

RESULTS

RCFD Survey Results

The first survey was conducted to gain insight into the rank and file personnel's perception on how well change is communicated in the department. Statement one of the rank and file communication survey asked the following: When changes to existing programs and policies or new programs are discussed, you are included in the discussions prior to implementation. Six percent (3 of 50) strongly agreed. Six percent (3 of 50) somewhat agreed. Fourteen percent (7 of 50) agreed. Forty four percent (22 of 50) somewhat disagreed. Thirty percent (15 of 50) strongly disagreed.

Statement two asked: Senior officers communicate changes in policy and programs to you effectively. Eight percent (4 of 50) strongly agreed. Sixteen percent (8 of 50) somewhat agreed. Twenty six percent (13 of 50) agreed. Forty two percent (21 of 50) somewhat disagreed. Eight percent (4 of 50) strongly disagreed.

Statement three asked: Senior officers communicate the organizations vision, goals and objectives to you at least annually. Eight percent (4 of 50) strongly agreed. Eighteen percent (9 of 50) somewhat agreed. Thirty percent (15 of 50) agreed. Twenty percent (10 of 50) somewhat disagreed. Twenty four percent (12 of 50) strongly disagreed.

Statement four asked: You have been asked to serve on a committee for a new program or policy change. Twelve percent (6 of 50) strongly agreed. Twelve percent (6 of 50) somewhat agreed. Ten percent (5 of 50) agreed. Thirty percent (15 of 50) somewhat disagreed. Thirty four percent (17 of 50) strongly disagreed. Two percent (1 of 50) did not answer.

Statement five asked: Senior officers provide feedback to you on newly implemented programs or policies. Six percent (3 of 50) strongly agreed. Sixteen percent (8 of 50) somewhat agreed. Thirty two percent (16 of 50) agreed. Thirty four percent (17 of 50) somewhat disagreed. Twelve percent (6 of 50) strongly disagreed.

Question six was open ended to allow for personal viewpoints, and asked: What if any changes would you recommend to senior management in communicating a change in programs or policies? Seventy percent (35 of 50) responded. The answers varied, there were three common complaints: senior officers did not discuss the “why” of the change. Seventy percent (27 of 35) of those personnel responding listed a lack of explaining why a specific change was being made as a chief complaint. Many respondents also felt that a change has been implemented well before they were made aware it. Forty eight percent (17 of 35) identified this as a problem area. Finally, forty percent (14 of 35) of those responding identified feedback from senior officers as being negative in nature.

The survey of RCFD senior officers was conducted to gain insight into the senior officers perceptions of how well they communicate change within the department. Statement one of the senior officer survey asked: When changes to existing programs and policies, or new programs are discussed, you include subordinates in discussions prior to implementation. Thirty one percent (4 of 13) strongly agreed. Thirty one percent (4 of 13) somewhat agreed. Fifteen percent (2 of 13) agreed. Twenty three percent (3 of 13) somewhat disagreed.

Statement two asked: As a senior officer you communicate changes in policy and programs to subordinates effectively. Fifteen percent (2 of 13) strongly agreed. Forty seven percent (6 of 13) somewhat agreed. Twenty three percent (3 of 13) agreed. Fifteen percent (2 of 13) somewhat disagreed.

Statement three asked: As a senior officer you communicate the organization's vision, goals, and objectives to subordinates at least annually. Twenty three percent (3 of 13) strongly agreed. Twenty three percent (3 of 13) somewhat agreed. Forty seven percent (6 of 13) agreed. Seven percent (1 of 13) somewhat disagreed.

Statement four asked: You have organized committee's from all ranks within the department for new programs or policy changes. Thirty one percent (4 of 13) strongly agreed. Twenty three percent (3 of 13) somewhat agreed. Seven percent (1 of 13) agreed. Thirty nine percent (5 of 13) somewhat disagreed.

Statement five asked: You provide feedback on newly implemented programs or policies to subordinates. Twenty three percent (3 of 13) strongly agreed. Thirty one percent (4 of 13) somewhat agreed. Thirty one percent (4 of 13) agreed. Fifteen percent (2 of 13) somewhat disagreed.

Question six asked: Are you currently enrolled in the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy, or a graduate of the program? Thirty one percent (4 of 13) responded yes. Sixty nine percent (9 of 13) responded no.

Question seven asked: Are you familiar with the Change Management Model? Thirty one percent (4 of 13) responded yes. Sixty nine percent (9 of 13) responded no.

Exercise Results

The Reaction to Change Inventory exercise was conducted to measure the level of resistance to change by RCFD personnel. The results are as follows: Thirty eight percent (19 of 51) of the respondents had a score of 40 and above, which indicates a strong support for change. Twenty three percent (12 of 51) scored between 20 and 30, which indicates moderate support for change. Thirty one percent (16 of 51) scored between -10 and 10, which indicates a willingness to comply with change. Four percent (2 of 51) scored between -20 and -30, which indicates moderate resistance to change. Four percent (2 of 51) scored -40 or below, which indicates strong resistance to change.

The Type O/Type D questionnaire was conducted to measure RCFD personnel's resilience to change. The results of the questionnaire are as follows: Ten percent (5 of 51) had a rating of 18 to 35, which is highly Type O; they interpret the world as a multifaceted and overlapping; maintains a strong purpose or vision that helps during times of change; has a high tolerance for ambiguity; manages many simultaneous task and demands successfully; takes risks in spite of potentially negative consequences.

Eighty eight percent (45 of 51) had a rating between 36 - 53, which is moderately Type O. The personnel in this category predominately view disruptions as a natural result of the changing world, but sometimes need a long recovery time after adversity or disappointment; exhibits patience, understanding, and humor when dealing with change; fails to ask for assistance from others when it is needed.

Two percent (1 of 51) had a rating of 54 - 71, which is moderately Type D; believes there is are usually lessons to be learned from challenges, but lacks an overriding purpose and the ability to stay focused; questions and modifies (when necessary) his/her own assumptions or frames of reference; becomes confused when faced with confusing information.

Interview Results

Mr. Rick Brown, a change management consultant for the Results Group Inc. was interviewed for this project. Results from the interview were used in the literature review and discussion sections of this project.

The first question asked of Mr. Brown was: In your opinion, what is the most important aspect of managing change? Mr. Brown's response was that the human side of change is often the most neglected. Managers should strive to provide strong support for those personnel having difficulty in dealing with change. Mr. Brown identified communication and participation as the means by which change can be implemented successfully.

The second question asked was: How important is communication in overcoming resistance to change? Mr. Brown spoke of communicating to employees by addressing the following questions to all who are involved: Why are we doing this? What is the process? Are all personnel involved? Mr. Brown explained that answering these questions initially will go a long way toward overcoming natural resistance; everyone should have a clear understanding of the change. Failure to inform can result in a lack of credibility, which can lead to resistance.

The third question was: What are some useful approaches to providing feedback, and how important is it to provide feedback to all employees? Mr. Brown spoke of using "milestones" or "small wins" as useful approaches. He also spoke of the use of "atta boys" when things are going well. Brown identified feedback as another form of communication, and identified it as vital to successful change implementation. The idea is to stay as positive as possible, and allow input from all directions.

The last question asked was: Are you familiar with the Change Management Model from the National Fire Academy? Mr. Brown stated that he was not personally familiar with the model, but that

most change models were standardized and very useful tools in organizing a proposed change. He warned that there is a danger in becoming “enamored with the process” which can take the focus away from the human element.

Answers to Research Questions

1. Do rank and file personnel feel that change is communicated effectively?

Answer:

No. The survey of rank and file personnel indicated that seventy four percent (37 of 50) either somewhat disagreed with, or strongly disagreed that they were involved in discussions on policy or program changes. Fifty percent (25 of 50) either somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that senior officers communicate change effectively. Forty six percent (23 of 50) felt that senior officers did not provide feedback on newly implemented programs or policies.

2. Do senior officers feel they communicate change effectively?

Answer:

Yes. The results of the senior officer survey clearly show that they feel change is being communicated effectively. Seventy seven percent (10 of 13) either strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, or agreed that subordinates are included in discussions on changes to existing, and new programs and policies. Eighty five percent (11 of 13) felt that they communicated change effectively to subordinates. Eighty five percent (11 of 13) felt they provided adequate feedback to subordinates on newly implemented programs and policies.

3. Are RCFD personnel resistant to change?

Answer:

No. The results of the two personal change exercises indicate that personnel are not resistant to change. The Reaction to Change Inventory showed that ninety two percent (47 of 51) of those responding showed at least a willingness to comply with change, of this percentage, twenty three percent (12 of 51) showed a moderate support for change, and thirty eight percent (19 of 51) showed a strong support for change. Only eight percent (4 of 51) of the respondents showed a moderate or strong resistance to change.

The Type O/Type D Questionnaire determined that ninety eight percent of the respondents were identified as being either moderately or highly Type O (opportunity-oriented) during times of change. Only one respondent was moderately Type D (danger-oriented).

DISCUSSION

Moving at the speed of change. This statement could be the buzz-phrase of the nineties, and into the new millennium. Those senior officers tasked with the responsibility of leading their organizations into the next millennium will not be able to do it alone. They will need the idea's, support, and participation of everyone in their organizations. Research indicates that failure to communicate change effectively will lead to resistance by those most affected by new changes, dooming the change project to eventual failure.

The literature review identified the benefits of communication in overcoming resistance, providing feedback, and participation by employees in discussions about a proposed change. The study clearly showed the differing perceptions of the rank and file personnel, and senior officers with regard to communicating change in the RCFD.

It is interesting to note the differing perceptions on three specific statements in both surveys. Statement one of both surveys asked if subordinates were involved in discussions about changes to new

and existing programs. The rank and file survey indicated that seventy four percent (37 of 50) disagreed that they are involved in discussion about changes. Seventy seven percent (10 of 13) of the senior officers felt they did involve their employees in discussions about perspective changes.

Statement two asked if change was communicated effectively. Eighty five percent (11 of 13) of the senior officers felt that change was communicated effectively, while fifty percent (25 of 50) of rank and file personnel felt change was not communicated effectively. Finally, statement three involved feedback being provided on newly implemented programs and policies. Eighty five percent of the senior officers felt they provided feedback in this area. While, forty six percent (23 of 50) felt the senior officers did not. Interestingly, in the last section of the rank and file survey forty percent (14 of 35) of those personnel responding identified feedback from senior officers as being negative in nature.

In noting the perceptions between senior officers, and rank and file personnel, it is important to stress that the perceptions of the employees, are considered the most important during a change. Kosson (1994) makes this point succinctly: “A managers perception of change in a particular work situation is not as important as the workers perception of it” (p. 329). The literature review, and surveys identified that the RCFD senior officers do not communicate change effectively. The review pointed out that everyone in the organization should be involved in the process from start to finish. Hardy (1997) points out: “Good change managers know: “involvement of the staff should not be seen as an option—it should be recognized as essential” (p. 29).

Another interesting aspect of this study was identified in the results of the senior officer survey. Questions 6 and 7 of the survey asked if the respondents had attended, or were currently enrolled in the EFOP at the National Fire Academy, and if they were familiar with the Change Management Model. Thirty one percent (4 of 13) answered yes to both questions. Sixty nine percent (9 of 13) responded no

to both questions. The chief of the RCFD has openly encouraged participation in the EFOP; the purpose behind attending was to bring back useful information to be shared with all officers within the department.

The author was only made aware of the Change Management Model after attending the Strategic Management of Change course. That coupled with the nine senior officers indicating they were not familiar with the model, clearly indicates that information obtained from the EFOP is not being shared with all officers. It is difficult to imagine this department not utilizing useful tools to aid in bringing about the changes needed to increase efficiency, and provide better service delivery in light of shrinking budgets.

Senior officers in the RCFD are federal employees, and therefore not entitled to the stipend provided by the National Fire Academy. The organization funds senior officer participation in the EFOP. The above mentioned occurrence is troubling given the amount of time, money, and effort provided to those participants of the EFOP. It is not an unreasonable request to have information gathered by participants, brought back and shared with everyone.

The personal change instruments utilized in this study also provided interesting results as well. The Reaction to Change Inventory, which measure personnel's resistance or support for change, identified ninety percent (47 of 51) of the respondents as being at least willing to support change. The Type O/Type D questionnaire which measures personnel's resilience, and whether they viewed change positively or negatively, was even more revealing; ninety eight percent (50 of 51) of the respondents were either moderately, or highly Type O.

In an interview with Mr. Rick Brown, the results of the personal change instruments were discussed. Mr. Brown identified the results as fairly high, he also stated that it would be in our

organizations best interest, to take full advantage of the fact that the majority of personnel in the RCFD show and openness for change.

Mr. Brown stated: “As managers you have an ethical obligation to keep all personnel informed throughout the change process. However, the lack of effectively communicating with everyone during the entire change process, even when employees show an openness for change can lead to resistance” (telephone interview, June 21, 1999). This is certainly true in the RCFD. Not communicating critical information about the programs mentioned in the Background and Significance section of this project, has more than likely inhibited the progress of both.

How can we as a department expect to come up with creative ideas for providing more services with tighter budgets, if we can not implement basic programs like those mentioned earlier.

The research validates the use of effective communication in overcoming resistance to change, improving feedback, and the participation of all employees within an organization. Effective communication and involvement by the entire organization is the key to successful change management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The problem that promoted this project is that the RCFD has not always communicated change effectively. The purpose of this project was to evaluate the perceptions of both senior officers, and rank and file personnel on how effectively change is communicated and implemented. This study was also used to measure RCFD personnel's resistance to change. Based on the results of this project the following recommendations are offered.

This study should be made available to all senior officers as soon as possible. RCFD senior officers should review their communication skills, and basic human resource management practices, particularly in the area of employee involvement. Research clearly indicated that effective

communication, and involvement of all personnel during every phase of a change project is essential if it is to be successful. The results of the rank and file survey indicated that this was not being accomplished.

Participants of the EFOP should make a concerted effort to explain the benefits of the Change Management Model to all personnel not familiar with its utility, as well as imparting new skills, and tools obtained through participation in the program. Results of this study identified that this is not occurring within the department.

Senior officers should take advantage of the RCFD personnel's openness to change, communicating, and involving them in all aspects of new change projects. The research indicated that if this is accomplished, resistance will be minimized, and the department can expect an inflow of new and creative ideas, as well as greater speed in implementation and institutionalizing new change projects.

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APPENDIX A

CHANGE MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION SURVEY

Instructions: listed below are statements concerning this departments ability to communicate change. Next to each statement you will find a number scale from 1-5. The numbers indicate the following: 1, strongly agree. 2, somewhat agree. 3, agree. 4, somewhat disagree. 5, strongly disagree. Please circle the number that best represents your opinion on each statement. Question 6 requires a written response, if necessary please use the back of this survey to complete your answer. This survey is voluntary and your name is not required. If you do not wish to participate please return the survey to me. Thank you for your participation.

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. When changes to existing programs and policies or new programs are discussed, you are included in the discussions prior to implementation. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. Senior officers communicate changes in policy and programs to you effectively. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. Senior officers communicate the organization's vision, goals and objectives to you at least annually. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. You have been asked to serve on a committee for a new program or policy change. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. Senior officers provide feedback to you on newly implemented programs or policies. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. What if any changes would you recommend to senior management in communicating a change in programs or policies? | |

APPENDIX B

CHANGE MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION SURVEY, SENIOR OFFICERS

Instructions: Listed below are statements and questions concerning the communication of changes by you as senior officers, to programs and policies, as well as the implementation of new programs and policies. Next to each statement you will find a number scale from 1-5. The numbers indicate the following: 1, strongly agree. 2, somewhat agree. 3, agree. 4, somewhat disagree. 5, strongly disagree. Please circle the number that best represents your opinion on each statement. Please place an "X" in the appropriate box marked yes or no. This survey is voluntary and your name is not required. If you do not wish to participate please return the survey to me. Thank you for your participation.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. When changes to existing programs and policies or new programs are discussed, you include subordinates in discussions prior to implementation. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. As a senior officer you communicate changes in policy and programs to subordinates effectively. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. As a senior officer you communicate the organization's vision, goals and objectives to subordinates at least annually. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. You have organized committee's from all ranks within the department for new programs or policy changes. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. You provide feedback on newly implemented programs or policies to subordinates. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. Are you currently enrolled in the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy, or a graduate of the program? | YES NO
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Are you familiar with the Change Management Model? | YES NO
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |

APPENDIX C

Reaction to Change
Inventory**REACTION TO CHANGE INVENTORY**

Instructions: From the list of 30 words below, circle/underline the words you most frequently associate with change.

Adjust	Different	Opportunity
Alter	Disruption	Rebirth
Ambiguity	Exciting	Replace
Anxiety	Fear	Revise
Better	Fun	Stress
Challenging	Grow	Transfer
Chance	Improve	Transition
Concern	Learn	Uncertainty
Death	Modify	Upheaval
Deteriorate	New	Vary

REACTION TO CHANGE INVENTORY

Instructions: Add the values of all the words that you circled/underlined to obtain your total score. Compare your score with the scale listed below.

Adjust	(0)	Different	(0)	Opportunity	(+10)
Alter	(0)	Disruption	(-10)	Rebirth	(+10)
Ambiguity	(-10)	Exciting	(+10)	Replace	(0)
Anxiety	(-10)	Fear	(-10)	Revise	(0)
Better	(+10)	Fun	(+10)	Stress	(-10)
Challenging	(+10)	Grow	(+10)	Transfer	(0)
Chance	(0)	Improve	(+10)	Transition	(0)
Concern	(-10)	Learn	(+10)	Uncertainty	(-10)
Death	(-10)	Modify	(0)	Upheaval	(-10)
Deteriorate	(-10)	New	(+10)	Vary	(0)

SCALE

Score of

40 and above
between 20 and 30
between -10 and 10
between -20 and -30
-40 and below

Indicates

Strong support for change
Moderate support for change
Willingness to comply with change
Moderate resistance to change
Strong resistance to change

APPENDIX D

Type O/Type D
Questionnaire

THE TYPE O/TYPE D QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Check (✓) the box that indicates your response to each of the statements.

	Strongly Agree		←-----→		Strongly Disagree
1. Change is threatening.					
2. Change is a normal and natural part of life.					
3. Change offers opportunities and challenges.					
4. I have an overarching purpose in my life					
5. Although I strive for perfection, I accept that it is impossible.					
6. Change make me feel insecure and uncertain.					
7. Whenever I am faced with change, I try to anticipate the sources of resistance to it.					
8. I have no problem with tapping the special skills of those around me.					
9. Many changes are the result of personal vendettas.					
10. Life is supposed to be filled with choices that produce even more demanding challenges.					
11. The cliché, “All comes to those who wait” describes my philosophy about life.					
12. Life is unpredictable, confusing and contradictory.					
13. The discomfort of change is just part of the adjustment process.					

Type O/Type D Questionnaire

14. When I feel angry and frustrated I take it out on others.
15. My problem-solving mode is triggered by disruption.
16. Bureaucracies cannot really be changed.
17. Change initiatives will always be mismanaged.
18. Any attempt at change merely triggers organizational inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

Strongly Agree ←-----→ Strongly Disagree

RATING

Total Score: _____

18	90
Type O	Type D
Opportunity-Oriented	Danger-oriented

INTERPRETATION

Rating of 18 - 35: Highly Type O; interprets the world as a multifaceted and overlapping; maintains a strong purpose or vision that helps during times of change; has a high tolerance for ambiguity; manages many simultaneous tasks and demands successfully; takes risks in spite of potentially negative consequences.

Rating of 36 - 53: Moderately Type O; predominately views disruptions as a natural result of the changing world, but sometimes needs a long recovery time after adversity or disappointment; exhibits patience, understanding, and humor when dealing with change; fails to ask for assistance from others when it is needed.

Rating of 54 - 71: Moderately Type D; believes there are usually lessons to be learned from challenges, but lacks an overriding purpose and the ability to stay focused; questions and modifies (when necessary) his/her own assumptions or frames of reference; becomes confused when faced with confusing information.

Rating of 72 - 90: Highly Type D; expects the future to be orderly and predictable and sees major change as uncomfortable and something to avoid; feels victimized during change and fails to break from established way of seeing/doing things.

THE TYPE O/TYPE D QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Compare this scoring sheet to the questionnaire you completed. For each box you checked, give yourself the number of points shown. Add the number of points to obtain your total score. Plot your score on the Type O/Type D Continuum.

	Strongly Agree	←-----→	Strongly Disagree		
1. Change is threatening.	5	4	3	2	1
2. Change is a normal and natural part of life.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Change offers opportunities and challenges.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have an overarching purpose in my life	1	2	3	4	5
5. Although I strive for perfection, I accept that it is impossible.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Change makes me feel insecure and uncertain.	5	4	3	2	1
7. Whenever I am faced with change, I try to anticipate the sources of resistance to it.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I have no problem with tapping the special skills of those around me.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Many changes are the result of personal vendettas.	5	4	3	2	1
10. Life is supposed to be filled with choices that produce even more demanding challenges.	1	2	3	4	5
11. The cliché, “All comes to those who wait” describes my philosophy about life.	5	4	3	2	1
12. Life is unpredictable, confusing and contradictory.	5	4	3	2	1
13. The discomfort of change is just part of the adjustment process.	1	2	3	4	5

**Type O/Type D
Scoring Sheet**

14. When I feel angry and frustrated I take it out on others.
15. My problem-solving mode is triggered by disruption.
16. Bureaucracies cannot really be changed.
17. Change initiatives will always be mismanaged.
18. Any attempt at change merely triggers organizational inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

Strongly Agree		Strongly Disagree		
		←-----→		
5	4	3	2	1
1	2	3	4	5
5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1